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ABSTRACT

The Winnipeg Centre Project is a field-based, work-study program that attempts to create more appropriate education for the inner-city child. Sponsored by the Planning and Research Branch of the Department of Colleges and Universities Affairs and administered by Brandon University in consultation with the Winnipeg School Division, the project is providing teacher training to 12 inner-city, minority group residents. The project is scheduled to run for 3 years and will involve 40-45 students. The main objective of the project is to provide teacher training to people who share common experiences with students from the inner city. The program itself involves not only university course work but 12-15 hours of student teaching each week, plus volunteer activities. Although the project has some disadvantages, statements from participants indicate a positive additude toward the project. (BRB)

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# WINNIPEG CENTRE PROJECT

"It's not that the education in the inner-city is better or worse than anywhere else. The problem is that it's inappropriate to the needs of the students," says Winnipeg School Board member, Don Reed.

The residents of the core area of Winnipeg include new immigrants, Canadian Indian and Metis families, welfare recipients and many of the working poor. The children of these families pour into Inner City Schools including Dufferin, John M. King, Pinkham and Aberdeen. They bring with them the problems and particular experiences of the inner-city. The content of the education and the form in which it is presented are often unconnected with the events and situations which make up the fabric of the children's lives outside the classroom.

The Winnipeg Centre Project is an innovative attempt to create more appropriate education for the inner-city child. Sponsored by the Planning and Research Branch of the Department of Colleges and Universities Affairs and administrated by Brandon University in consultation with the Winnipeg School Division, the project is providing teacher-training to 12 inner-city residents in the first year. The project will run for three years and involve a maximum of approximately 40-45 students.

The main objective of the project is to provide teacher-training to people who share common experiences with the children and thus can help to make the school a compatible rather than an alien environment. The project also has the potential to break-down the barriers between the school and the community by creating a greater capacity within the school system to meet the needs of the inner-city community.

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Project director Jack Deines, a member of the Faculty of Education at the University of Brandon, says the project is based on two principles, "that at least some inner-city people should be teaching their own children and that classroom experience has at least as much value as education theory."

The student teachers are enrolled in the regular Bachelor of Teaching program at the University of Brandon, however, they will take up to three years to attain their certificate instead of the normal two years. An additional year of study after certification is required for a B.T. degree. The extended program allows the Winnipeg Centre student-teachers to spend additional time in the classrooms at the three elementary schools in the Winnipeg Centre area. The project, referred to as a "field based work-study program" is designed to provide for up to 50% student-teaching time and 50% academic study for 60 credit hours.

For the students the pace is a hectic one. Besides taking the regular academic courses they also spend 12-15 hours of student-teaching each week in the classroom in addition to the volunteer activities they have undertaken at the schools. Most of them have family responsibilities as well.

"I've learnedto read on the bus," says Pat. "In fact I don't think I've taken a bus since September that I haven't read on."

Ray said his most difficult problem was programming himself to study. "From the very beginning I made myself sit down and work for three hours every night."

Academic qualifications were not the prime criteria used to select the 12 candidates although the students were required to show sufficient communications skills to handle the course work. The students

were selected on the basis of inner-city residency and understanding of the culture milieu in which they would be working. Preference was given to Indian and Metis applicants and members of other minority groups. All of the applicants had to be over 21 years of age to qualify for the mature students entrance program at the university. They had to be individuals who for financial or academic reasons would not be able to participate in the regular education program.

Of the 12 students selected, 10 are women. They range from 21-40 years of age. While in the program the students receive training allowances from the Department of Colleges and Universities Affairs equivalent to those provided under the Canada Manpower system.

The student-teachers occupy four rooms in Aberdeen Junior Highschool, where they take their academic courses as well as individual remedial work. They are very conscious of being involved in an innovative project. However institutional resistance to the project and some negative publicity including one local media personality who referred to them as "semi-literates" has only served to harden their conviction that they have a role to play as teachers in the inner-city schools.

Pat explains, "We're more confident with inner-city children. I'm not shaken up if I hear certain family problems or rough language."

Maria Wacyk who is responsible for personal counselling and for any academic remedial work the students may require, points out, "This is not a do-good project. What we are doing is capitalizing on abilities which are extremely valuable."

For Julie, one of her long-term goals is to see Cree and Saulteaux as part of the regular school system. She also believes it may be

necessary to establish separate private schools for native students. "There must be an environment in which native students can develop a good self-concept."

Julie says the value of native teachers in a school with a large native student population is immediate. "As soon as children hear a few words in their own language, they open right up".

One of the innovations in inner-city education which she sees the Winnipeg Centre Project bringing about is stronger links between the community and the school. "As an inner-city resident and a parent I know how hard it is to approach the school. The first initiative must come from the teacher to visit parents in their homes."

Two other native student-teachers, Dorothy and Leonna are teaching Saulteaux on a volunteer basis at Dufferin elementary school. Attendance, particularly among native children has been high.

This emphasis on the educational needs of native students has spread to other student-teachers on the project. When the students made up their priority list for academic courses during the second year, considerable interest has been shown toward the formal study of both Cree and Saulteaux.

The 12 Winnipeg Centre student-teachers jokingly refer to themselves as "the disciples". As an example of the kind of supportive relationships which have developed, it is not unusual to see the entire group take on the responsibility of solving one of the student-teacher's babysitting problems.

The twelve have a strong loyalty to the project partly because, as mentioned earlier, they are the first participants in this teacher-training project which breaks new ground. A more significant reason for their loyalty however, is the extent to which the student-teachers feel

it is their project. "From the beginning everything has been discussed with us. We know what decisions are coming up, and our suggestions and criticisms are listened to. We've always know when we are being used as a political football somewhere in the system."

This student-centred approach is built into the structure of the Winnipeg Centre Project . Three student-teachers sit on the Executive committee along with a representative from Planning and Research, a Winnipeg School Division trustee and a representative from Brandon University.

Between 15 and 18 students will be recruited in the second year of the project. As in the first year, recruitment of the second group of Winnipeg Centre Project student-teachers will be done through the various ethnic and community groups in the area. The 12 student-teachers already involved in the project have taken on the responsibility of recruiting applications through their contacts in the various groups. They will also be key actors in the selection and orientation of the new student-teachers.

Juvenal, the only Portuguese person on the program is doing his student-teaching at John M. King elementary school where the largest ethnic group represented are the Portuguese. "Juvenal is invaluable," said teacher, Laureen Walker, "for communications between the school and the parents, between the Portuguese students and teachers."

Laureen sees bi-lingual teachers like Juvenal, as a means of building closer links between the ethnic communities and the school system. Juvenal sees an even broader role, "I think I have an appreciation of problems not just of the Portuguese community but of all the immigrant groups."

At John M. King, the five Winnipeg Centre Project student-

teachers have been putting in volunteer time on the oral communications program for non-English students. Each of the student-teachers works with 3 or 4 children at a time.

Ray developed a paper cartoon puppet which the children could fit over their hands as a means of encouraging the children to speak English. "I discovered they were much less shy about talking to the puppet than they were talking to me".

Out of that experiment Ray was invited to take on another volunteer activity - showing a grade one and a grade three class how to draw cartoon characters.

All of the student teachers have taken on volunteer activities in addition to their regular student-teaching. They see these volunteer activities as a way of gaining additional practical experience but also it is a way for them to prove their value in the schools and to pave the way for future Winnipeg Centre Project students. "Probably we will be hired when we get our certificates because we're the first group. So the credibility of the whole program is, in a way, our responsibility,"said Ray.

The teachers who are working with the Winnipeg Centre Project students see advantages and idsadvantages to the program and some are more enthusiastic than others. Isle Globerman, Ray's co-operating teacher is one of the enthusiasts. "I've never had to experience not knowing what a zoo animal is for example, or living in a small home with a large family and not having any private space. I'm learning these things but Ray already knows them. He knows how to react to the children".

Isle spends considerable extra time with Ray. After each lesson, which Ray teaches, she prepares a written critique which they discuss. "I try to point out the positive as well as the negative but still it's a tribute to Ray's maturity that we have this kind of realtionship."

Isle's only real criticism of the program was that clarification about the project was late in coming to the teachers. "At first we didn't know what was going on".

Laureen Walker, and Juvenal's co-operating teacher is another enthusiast. "Juvenal is a better teacher in his first year than a lot of regular education students in their graduating year."

Laureen would like to see the regular education course altered so that the students spend more time in the classroom.

One teacher 'wondered' whether certain "experiential gaps in the Winnipeg Centre students' backgrounds such as knowledge of classical music and ballet would be a drawback." (Editors note: At least one of the Winnipeg Centre student-teachers has classical music training.)

One of the initiators of the project, Assistant Deputy Minister, Lionel Orlikow, describes it as "a moderate reform".

"We've diverted education dollars to a group who have never had access to those dollars before. We've demonstrated that people who are expected to fail by conventional standards, are not failing. This has been a powerful lesson. I'm more and more skeptical of tradition norms about academic and professional standards," he said.

Dr. Orlikow's reservations about the Winnipeg Centre project, centre on the lack of linkages between the school and the community and the centralized control of the school system. "Unless we can build community involvement into the program it is very possible that the student-teachers will eventually be cut off from their roots. If that happens they will be changed by the system not the other way around," he said

He also pointed out that unless the school system becomes more flexible investing more authority at the individual school level, it

will not be possible to create the kinds of programs which will make the school an organic part of the community. "We need prgrams that will build on the strengths rather than penalizing the weaknesses of the surrounding community."

Some of the other problems which the project has encountered include resistance to a teacher-training project at a time of "teacher-oversupply" in the province. The counter-arguement is the under-representation of certain groups within the teaching profession.

Problems have also occurred around the issue of university standards and the isolation of the university from community needs. "In Canada, there hasn't been the social pressures for change on the whole educational structure which have occurred in the United States. The education system here continues to be a vertical insular system," said Dr. Orlikow.

The Director, Jack Deines, says that now the project has established itself within the schools, more effort can be spent developing complimentary programs such as community involvement.

Two courses, which are being discussed with Winnipeg Centre Project students for next year's academic program are applied community development and an economics course, Labour in Canadian Society. In the community development course, students will undertake community development activities in the inner-city working closely with existing agencies such as the welfare self-help groups and the Indian-Metis Friendship Centre.

The Labour in Canadian Society course will focus on education as it relates to non-middle and upper class students. Issues such as

welfare, unemployment, wages and prices and housing will also be discussed both in their practical manifestations within the inner-city community and also within the larger context of the structures of Canadian society. "We hope, through these two courses, to provide the Winnipeg Centre students with the tools necessary to initiate and develop community development programs out of the school," says Jack.

A University of Manitoba staff development project for 10 teachers in the Winnipeg School Division has been planned to get underway in September of 1973. Besides their academic work leading to eight full credit courses at the University of Manitoba, the 10 teachers, referred to as faculty assistants, will be developing innovative approaches to teaching and curriculum which fit the needs of an inner-city setting. They will be working closely with the Winnipeg Centre Project student-teachers and their supervising teachers to facilitate classroom relationships between teacher and child and to develop innovative techniques for involving parents in that relationship.